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# Congress faces covert-aid showdown

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WASHINGTON — A major pre-election showdown looms between the Reagan administration and congressional Democrats over covert aid to Nicaraguan rebels, despite a White House decision to abandon efforts to obtain an extra \$21 million this fiscal year.

The Democrats, bolstered by presidential nominee Walter Mondale's pledge to end the CIA's covert program within 100 days of taking office, are now out to scuttle the entire operation.

The administration already has advised Congress, both administration and congressional sources said last week, that it will no longer push for the additional \$21 million covert funding this fiscal year.

Instead, according to Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, R-Tenn., the White House will concentrate on getting \$28 million for the Nicaraguan rebels in 1985 and obtaining \$250 million in military aid for El Salvador in 1984 and 1985.

Already, however, the Democratic-controlled House is mobilizing to kill the 1985 covert aid request with a major test likely on Thursday. The House is scheduled to vote then on the 1985 Intelligence Authorization Bill that contains about \$12 billion for the entire U.S. intelligence apparatus.

In May, the House Intelligence Committee deleted from that bill the \$28 million for the Nicaraguan insurgents and continued a ban on the use of CIA contingency funds to finance the rebels.

This restriction is included in the 1985 intelligence bill and the House needs to approve it to close



Baker

the last possible avenue for the CIA to fund the Nicaragua program. A similar prohibition is in effect now.

## Dead this time?

Intelligence Committee sources say, however, that Republican representatives are expected to offer amendments restoring the funds and eliminating the ban.

An aide to House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, D-Mass., said the speaker will instruct Democrats to vote against any compromise designed to keep the covert program alive.

Rep. Michael Barnes, D-Md., chairman of the House Western Hemisphere Affairs Subcommittee, said that this time Democrats cannot afford to compromise in light of Mondale's promise in his San Francisco acceptance speech to shut down the covert war if he is elected.

"This means the covert aid is dead for good this time," Barnes said.

The House has voted three times to kill the Nicaragua operation but the Republican-led Senate has voted to keep it going.

The decision to suspend efforts to get the \$21 million this fiscal year constitutes a major shift in the administration position from last spring when the White House initially introduced the request in Congress. The administration said then that the funds were urgently needed to resupply the Nicaraguan rebels, reportedly running out of ammunition, food, clothing, medicines and cash to meet the payroll.

## 'New realism'

But Congressional sources with access to intelligence information said private organizations in the United States and Latin America, as well as some Latin governments, have supplied the rebels with money to keep them going this year, and Israel has provided ammunition and weapons.

Aides to Baker and to Senate Assistant Majority Leader Ted

Stevens, R-Alaska, said they have received word from the White House and the CIA not to push "very hard" for the \$21 million and to save their efforts for the \$28 million for 1985.

"The covert program is not dead," said a Baker aide. "It is just on hold for the time being."

"The new realism here," said a White House official, "is that, as the saying goes, you shoot the wolf that is closest to the sled and that wolf now happens to be the supplemental money for El Salvador and the rest of the programs for Central America. We realize that the Nicaragua program is very difficult at this time due to stiff Democratic opposition."

The Senate Intelligence Committee already has approved the \$28 million for 1985 with a requirement that the CIA make periodic reports on the covert program in order to avoid controversies such as the mining of Nicaraguan harbors. The \$28 million is currently included in the Senate version of the 1985 Intelligence Authorization Bill.

## Alternative plans

Since the intelligence bill does not formally appropriate funds for the Nicaragua operation, but only authorizes them, the money must be attached to an appropriations measure.

A spokesman for Baker said it is possible that the \$28 million may be included in the so-called Jackson Plan, named for late Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson, D-Wash. But he acknowledged that this could endanger the funds for El Salvador.

Another possibility, according to Congressional aides, is to attach the covert funds to the 1985 defense appropriations bill or to the so-called continuing resolution, an annual stopgap measure to fund the entire U.S. government.

Republican legislators are concerned, however, that given the stiff Democratic opposition to Nicaraguan covert aid, they may block either the defense bill or the Continuing Resolution in an effort to kill the rebel funding.